The Series 3 Funeral Services

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THE PRAYER BOOK BURIAL SERVICE is one of Cranmer's most characteristic pieces of work. No service expresses more strongly the Pauline and Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. It is emphatically a service for the burial of Christians, and the sentences, the lesson, the committal, the prayers all say the same things about deceased Christians—they speak of 'resurrection', 'life', 'glory', 'victory', 'rest', 'joy and felicity', of 'dying in the Lord' or 'departing in the Lord' to 'see God' and be 'with God'. The dead enjoy all this because they 'believed in Christ', because they were 'the faithful'. And they enjoy it now. Though the resurrection is still to come, they have life and blessedness already. They 'shall never die'; they 'shall not die eternally'; the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord 'do live with God'; after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, they 'are in joy and felicity'. There is no purgatorial interval, and therefore no place for petitions or requiem masses on their behalf. The carefully worded prayers for the dead which were included in 1549 were as carefully altered in 1552 to declarations, thanksgivings, and prayers for the living, and so they remained in 1662. The communion service which was included in 1549 was silently dropped, as a precautionary measure, in 1552, and did not return at the Restoration. What was left was a simple and magnificent expression of the Christian's humble but triumphant confidence in face of the awful mystery of death.

A clergyman's attitude to the Prayer Book Burial service is a real test of the man and his ministry. The contempt and abhorrence of this service expressed by some who write letters in the *Church Times* suggests an attitude of mind completely out of touch with the Christian gospel, and one is forced to wonder what ministry to the bereaved such clergy have to offer. Again, the treatment which the service receives from liturgical revisers is a real test of their competence for the task of Prayer Book revision. If, like the 1928 revisers (followed in *Alter-*

native Services Series 1 and some of the revisions abroad), they graft upon the 1662 stock petitions implying that the deceased does not as yet enjoy either peace or rest, but asking that he may, they display a complete lack of sympathy and understanding regarding the service with which they are dealing, since the service elsewhere states that the faithful departed are already living with God in joy and felicity. The same applies if (as in *Alternative Services Series 2*) they attempt to meet the scruples of many clergy about using the Prayer Book service over the unchurched masses by toning down the gospel assurances about deceased Christians until they are interchangeable with expressions of modern humanistic optimism about deceased unbelievers.

Doctrinal considerations

THESE, then, are the questions that are bound to be in the forefront of one's mind when one opens the *Series 3 Funeral Services*,[1] which had their first airing in the General Synod in July this year. The question of petition for the dead is a doctrinal question. Assuming that the dead exist under conditions of time (and passages of the New Testament like Revelation 6: 9-11 show that this is not an improper way of thinking of them), they have not yet passed through the final judgment and the general resurrection, and have therefore not yet reached their ultimate destiny. So petition on their behalf is not ruled out *a priori*, as necessarily unorthodox or meaningless. On the other hand, their probation is over and their eternal destiny settled (John 3: 36; 8: 21, 24; Rom. 1-3; 2 Cor. 5: 10; Heb. 9: 27), and they are already experiencing a foretaste of that destiny, whether it be joy or woe (Luke 16: 19-31; 23: 43; 2 Cor. 5: 6-8; Phil. 1: 21, 23; Rev. 14: 13). There are therefore strict limits to the sort of petition that one may rightly make. As the writer has said elsewhere, 'one *cannot* pray for those who are already irrevocably sentenced, and undergoing their sentence; and as for those who are already enjoying their reward, all that one can rightly pray for them is that they may (in accordance with God's sure promise) continue in blessedness and be confirmed in it at the day of judgment. Prayers for the dead which are of the latter type, though very restricted in scope, are not unorthodox, but whether it is expedient to use even these, especially in the congregation, is far less certain. A practice compassed with such serious possibilities of abuse as prayer for the dead—possibilities which have, over wide areas of the church, become actualities, and this for long periods extending right up to the present day—is a practice which ought to be introduced only with the greatest hesitation. If it is introduced, the strictest conditions of clarity and orthodoxy need to be observed in the forms authorised. Prayers for the dead which are vague in their meaning, or positively misleading, ought beyond question to be rigidly excluded.'[2]

In drawing up the *Series 3 Funeral Services*, the Liturgical Com-

mission had the opportunity to profit both from the attempt to find an agreed solution to this question of prayer for the dead which was initiated by the House of Laity in connection with the abortive Series 2 Burial services, and from the Doctrine Commission's report *Prayer and the Departed* which followed. (These were the subject of an article by Mr. H. R. M. Craig, a member of the House of Laity, in the Autumn 1972 issue.) On both occasions a degree of alertness was shown to the issues outlined above, though some of the forms of words proposed by the Doctrine Commission suffered from vagueness, and one was concerned not so much with deceased Christians as with the lost.

Petitions for the departed are included in the *Series 3 Funeral Services*, but the requests that they make are orthodox. Section 11 (repeated at 29) is a petition for a happy resurrection, section 45 for continuance in present blessedness, apparently, and sections 47, 48 for God's will to be done. Most of the petitions are for dead Christians, but section 48 is the Doctrine Commission's prayer for the lost (also used in *Series 3 Holy Communion*),[8] which is odd in view of the fact that the service elsewhere assumes the deceased to be a believer, and is consequently intended for the baptised (see the Introduction, p. 5); indeed, Canon B 38 would seem to prohibit the use of such an alternative to the Prayer Book service at the burial of anyone else. Most of the petitions are optional, but not section 11/29. The ambiguous word 'commend' is usually avoided in the services, 'entrust' being rightly substituted, but not in the petition at section 48 (or in the Introduction, p. 5).

This undoubtedly shows that the critics of prayer for the dead are beginning to be listened to. But can it be regarded as a final solution? It is clear to the writer that it cannot. A comparison with the 1549 Prayer Book is instructive, as always. There too the petitions for the departed were orthodox, and they were *all* obligatory, not just one; but this is offset by the fact that there was no petition for the lost. To accept the petitions for the departed in the *Series 3 Funeral Services* would be to return, substantially, to the provisions of the 1549 Prayer Book. The 1549 Prayer Book, Cranmer insisted, was orthodox in its doctrine, but its orthodoxy was not nearly so clear as that of the 1552 book. It was never intended as more than a first stage in reform, and the efforts made by Gardiner and others to misinterpret it in a mediaeval sense showed how necessary a further revision was. To simple minds or determined wills it could easily seem that, since the book contained obligatory prayers for the dead, prayer for the dead must be a vital part of public worship; and that since the book made no explicit distinction between one type of prayer for the dead and another, to admit one was to admit all. The same is true today. Is there, then, no alternative to the course taken in 1552, whereby petition for the dead was excluded altogether? As far as I can see, there is only one alternative, which is to observe the following four requirements:

(i) To keep all petitions for the dead orthodox, so that the liturgy can safely be put into the hands of all, and clergy can assent conscientiously to its doctrine.

(ii) To exclude petitions for the lost, which are contrary to Christian tradition and are not charitable: to pray that 'God's will may be fulfilled in' the lost is to stir up the fires of hell. In any case, it is incongruous to include such prayers in a service for the burial of Christians.

(iii) To make all petitions for the dead optional, so as to silence the claim that such extra-biblical customs are vital to Christian worship, and so as to avoid wounding weak consciences.

(iv) To add to the liturgy an explanatory rubric, like those in the Prayer Book at the end of Holy Communion and the Public Baptism of Infants, and like that at the beginning of the Series 2 Infant Baptism service, which will state explicitly what types of petitions for the dead the Church of England approves and what types it does not. In this way, those who are unable or unwilling to distinguish orthodox petitions from unorthodox will be helped and encouraged to do so, and guidelines will at the same time be provided for future revisers of the liturgy.

Unfortunately, only the first of these four requirements is fulfilled in the *Series 3 Holy Communion* and *Funeral Services*.

A second doctrinal feature which the *Series 3 Funeral Services* share with the 1549 Burial service is that they make provision for a celebration of Holy Communion on the occasion. In this case, however, the Series 3 provisions are definitely better, in that the collect provided is not a petition for the dead, and consequently does not so readily give the service the appearance of a requiem mass.[4] Of course, the eucharistic liturgy used (like Series 3, which the Commission recommends for the purpose) may itself contain petition for the dead, but this is hardly the fault of the funeral provisions. The Liturgical Commission would have done well to emphasise that there must be an actual administration of the sacrament, not just to hint at it. If they had, and if the choice of lessons had been better,[5] it could be argued that their funeral communion has no resemblance to a requiem mass, and is just as appropriate and edifying as the existing celebration at marriages and ordinations.

The final doctrinal question is whether the *Series 3 Funeral Services* are, all in all, an adequate presentation of the gospel: are they, as we have said of the 1662 service, a true 'expression of the Christian's humble but triumphant confidence in face of the awful mystery of death'? It must be said at once that there is very little here about the awful mystery of death. Except from some of the alternative lessons, it would hardly be guessed that death was the end of a man's probation, and that eternal issues depend on the state in which he dies. Then again, these services are much less distinct than 1662 about the intermediate state, though it is good to see Philippians 1: 23 added as an

opening sentence, and 2 Corinthians 5: 1-10 as a lesson.[8] But it must also be recognised that much of the joyful assurance of 1662 about deceased Christians is to be found here also (sections 1-3, 5, 7, 13, 15 etc.) in material both old and new, and that the significance of their faith, is perhaps stressed even more than in the old service (sections 1, 7, 13, 20/36, 40). The hope expressed in the Introduction (p. 6) that 'the remains of mediaeval gloom have finally given way to a more authentically Christian note of confidence and hope' probably refers both to these passages of joyful assurance and to the less commendable absence of reference to the awful seriousness of death. But what is meant by the statement on page 5 'that the rite should not assume that the soul of the deceased is, at the time of the burial of the body, in any particular place or state' is hard to see. Despite the aberration in section 48, discussed earlier, the Services do assume that the deceased was a baptised believer, and that he is now rejoicing in the presence of God. One can only assume that, as this statement earlier formed part of the introduction to the misguided Series 2 Burial services, it has been carried over to the new Introduction without sufficient consideration.

Disciplinary considerations

IT is paradoxical but true that at a funeral Christian discipline applies not to the living but to the dead. The service is not designed to benefit the dead, like a requiem mass: as the Reformers insisted, funeral rites exist exclusively for the glory of God and the edification of the living. But the discipline which decides whether the Church's usual service, for the burial of Christians, is to be used or not, is a continuation of the discipline which the deceased experienced in his lifetime. If he was recognised as a Christian in his lifetime, then he is recognised as one still; if he was not, then he cannot be recognised as one now. The state in which he died is decisive for the Church, just as it is for God.

Of course, a service for the burial of Christians does not only make assumptions about the faith of the deceased, but also about that of the congregation. It is assumed that at the burial of a Christian fellow-Christians will gather, who will expect the service to express Christian sentiments. In any case there will be a Christian officiant, and it is into his mouth that most of the words of the service will be put. Non-Christians may of course be present, or even in a majority, but in their case the words of the service will still be relevant, since the message of justification by faith is admirable evangelism.

The only searcher of hearts is God, and the Church cannot judge whether a man was a Christian, and entitled to burial as such, except by outward signs. Up to 1604, the cases in which the Burial service

was not to be used had to be decided by pre-Reformation law and custom, since there was no other guide. Canon 68 of 1604 ruled, however, that the service was not to be used in the case of those excommunicated by the diocesan court (i.e. cut off not simply from the sacrament but from all Christian fellowship and privileges); and it was no doubt assumed at this date that all Englishmen were baptised, and that consequently the service would not be used over those who were not. With the progress of the Baptist movement in the seventeenth century, however, a sufficient number of children were growing up without baptism for it to be necessary in 1662 to make this too explicit, and a rubric was then prefixed to the service excluding both the excommunicate and the unbaptised. (No substitute service was authorised till 1880: for the present provisions, see Canon B 38.) The rubric added a third class of excluded persons, those who 'have laid violent hands upon themselves', i.e. been found *felo de se*, and the 1928 Prayer Book proposed adding by analogy those who 'die in the act of committing any grievous crime', a proposal to which legal effect was never given. The reason for adding this third class may have been that they were considered excommunicate *ipso facto*, and if so this lends support to the view that 'excommunicate' in the 1662 rubric includes not only those *sentenced* to excommunication but also those other classes of persons declared excommunicate *ipso facto* by the 1604 Canons. Excommunication, in the full sense, lapsed in the eighteenth century, though the Church of England is still committed to it in principle (Article 33), and the lesser discipline of exclusion from the Lord's table continues. The growth of nonconformity really makes excommunication impracticable. The exclusion of wilful suicides has also been whittled away, first by the reluctance of coroners to bring in this verdict except in the clearest cases, and their consequent practice of making the charitable presumption that the balance of the deceased's mind was disturbed; and more recently by the removal of suicide from the statute book in 1961, since when coroners have less and less often seen it as part of their duty to decide whether the act was wilful or not. The three classes of excluded persons still appear in the Canons (Canon B 38), but the Liturgical Commission in the *Series 3 Funeral Services* have understandably reduced the classes to one, the unbaptised, and have explicitly proposed that suicides should not be excluded (Introduction, p. 5).

Even in the seventeenth century, when the exclusion of the excommunicate was in full force, the Puritans took offence at the wide application of the service, and proposed that its expressions of the glorious assurance of salvation should be toned down (see Edward Cardwell, *Conferences on the Book of Common Prayer*, Oxford, The University Press, 1840, pp. 277, 333). The bishops, in the reply that they made at the Savoy Conference, gave classic expression to the principle of charitable presumption, on which the Church of England

has always worked, and which is essential to the being of a national church:

> 'We see not why these words may not be said of any person whom we dare not say is damned, and it were a breach of charity to say so even of those whose repentance we do not see: for whether they do not inwardly and heartily repent, even at the last act, who knows? and that God will not even then pardon them upon such repentance, who dares say? It is better to be charitable, and hope the best, than rashly to condemn' (*op. cit.*, p. 361f.).

In the nineteenth century, when excommunication had lapsed, some Evangelicals were again exercised with the Puritans' scruples, and more understandably. In our own day, when there has been such a fall away from churchgoing, the tension between the national profession of Christianity and actual practice has become acute, and some are of course advocating extreme measures. Attention is at present on baptism, and to some extent on marriage, but it will be surprising if it is not soon extended to burial also. Those who are already saying that only regular communicants ought to be allowed baptism for their children (contrary to the analogy of circumcision, on which they rely, and contrary to the teaching of the classical Anglican divines, such as Hooker and Whitgift),[7] will no doubt be adding before long that only regular communicants ought to be admitted to Christian marriage or burial. Evangelicals have always campaigned against merely formal Christianity, but there are two possible ways of conducting this needful campaign. One is the inclusive way, characteristic of a national church, which explains to people the meaning of their professions whenever in their lifetime the opportunity arises (not, of course, after their death!), but then leaves it to their own consciences whether they continue to claim the privileges of church-membership; accepting their professions, if they continue to make them, at their face-value, and taking care not to 'break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax'. The other way is the exclusive way, characteristic of the rigid sect, which sets itself up as the judge of others' consciences, and attempts to take all decisions out of their hands. The former is the traditional Anglican way, endorsed in the new Canons (Canon B 22); the latter tends towards the disestablishment of the Church of England, and the loss of its links with the unchurched masses, and can easily drive people to seek the services of a less exacting denomination, or even to do for themselves what the Church will not do for them.[8] The Liturgical Commission, one is glad to see, has now settled definitely (after its Series 2 hesitations) for the traditional Anglican way, and has produced services which, while assuming the faith of the deceased, and expressing strongly the Christian hope on his behalf, are designed to 'suffice for all baptised persons' (Introduction, p. 5).

Structure and content

THE 1549 Burial service placed the committal at the beginning and everything else afterwards, the latter half of the service to be used in the church building. The option of placing the committal at the end and the remainder at the beginning was also given. The 1552 service so reduced the length of the remainder by the omission of the psalms that the permission to transpose the parts, and to go to the church building for one part alone, was dropped. In 1662, psalms were restored (though different ones), and the committal was placed in the middle of the service. This change of order is one of the more curious and regrettable alterations made by the 1662 revisers, and is very awkward in practice. No one will regret that in Series 3 the committal, as the climax of the service, is put at the end.

Two special forms of the main service are appended in Series 3, one for the funeral of a child (following 1912 Scottish precedent) and the other for a service to be used before the funeral either in church or in the home (following much older precedent); a special form of the committal is also provided for the burial of the ashes after a cremation. These seem useful additions. All services are adapted to cover cremations: hence the new title 'funeral' services.

Some of the opening sentences have been changed; the psalms have been changed for others which seem more suitable to the writer than either those of 1549 or those of 1662; the vast lesson has been shortened, and alternatives provided; explicit permission is made for the sermon, which has been a common custom ever since the Reformation,* but has never been given rubrical permission; and a number of additions have been made, notably prayers for the comforting and strengthening of the mourners (sections 44, 46). Some of the content of 1662 is retained with only verbal alteration: the first opening sentence, the lesson from 1 Corinthians 15, 'I heard a voice from heaven . . .', and the words of committal (sections 1, 5, 13, 15). But some also is completely gone: the burial anthem ('Man that is born of woman . . .'), the direction to cast earth on the coffin, and the concluding prayers. These three omissions seem really regrettable.

Language

THE language of the services is that of *Series 3 Holy Communion*, with a share of its infelicities, and with its 'you'-mode of addressing God. The psalms are from the interesting new version of the Psalter on which the Commission is working, where more concessions are made to the needs of poetical vocabulary and phraseology, but where 'you' seems peculiarly inappropriate. Two incidental verbal faults deserve mention: in section 2, the NEB rendering 'God will bring them to life with Jesus' (suggesting that the resurrection of Jesus has yet to take place) is adopted for 1 Thessalonians 4: 14, 18; and in section 5, the

alternative lesson Philippians 3: 10-21 would begin in the middle of a sentence, and is presumably meant to be Philippians 3: 8-21.

All in all, despite its doctrinal deficiencies, its regrettable omissions and its linguistic lapses, this is one of the Liturgical Commission's more successful productions, and deserves a qualified welcome. The fact that, unlike many of their services, it bears a recognisable relationship to the Prayer Book service may not be a coincidence.

[1] London, SPCK, 1973, 26pp., £0.25 (GS 147).

[2] *Prayer Book Revision and Anglican Unity* (London, CBRP, 1967), p. 12f. This booklet contains a somewhat fuller treatment of prayer for the dead, and analyses the different types of petition on their behalf that have been used in modern revisions of the Prayer Book services in various parts of the Anglican Communion.

[3] The prayer is not *verbatim* the same as the Doctrine Commission's, but the Liturgical Commission admits that it is modelled on theirs and has the same intention. They refer to '*Prayer and the Departed* (pp. 53-5)' and describe their purpose as 'not invariably to exclude the commemoration of other departed apart from the faithful departed' (*A Commentary on Holy Communion Series 3*, London, SPCK, 1971, p. 16). The use here of minimising language in a vain attempt to excuse a concession of principle speaks for itself.

[4] The 1549 collect was revised in 1552 so that it was no longer a petition for the dead, and was then appended to the Burial service proper, though still retaining its title of 'collect'. The title still remains in the 1559 and 1662 Prayer Books, and probably has no significance except as a relic, though celebrations of the sacrament on the occasion of funerals were not unknown in the early years of the reign of Elizabeth (see Vernon Staley, *Hierurgia Anglicana*, London, De la More, 1902-04, pt. 2, pp. 189-192).

[5] Both the Old Testament lesson and the Epistle are unfortunate. In this context, phrases like 'after a little chastisement they will receive great blessings' and 'even though now you smart for a little while, if need be, under trials of many kinds. Even gold passes through the assayer's fire' could easily be misunderstood of the temporary punishment inflicted by the fires of purgatory, from which requiem masses are supposed to deliver the souls of the dead.

[6] Even after all the recent discussion, it still seems most natural to understand vv. 2-9 of 2 Cor. 5 as referring to an intermediate state outside the body.

[7] For the view that only regular communicants ought to be allowed baptism for their children, see C. O. Buchanan, *Baptismal Discipline* (Nottingham, Grove Books, 1972). For the views of Hooker and Whitgift, see the *Ecclesiastical Polity* of the former, 3:1:12 and 5:64:5, and the *Works* of the latter (Parker Society), vol. 3, pp. 135, 138-149, 576. As regards circumcision, the covenant of which it was the sign was to a thousand generations, not just one; the rite was obligatory on household slaves, not just on children of the family; and the duty to see that the obligation was carried out lay upon the head of the household, not upon the priest.

[8] This is said not just with regard to baptism but also to burial. A Roman Catholic mother, refused baptism for her child, was recently reported in the press to have baptised him herself; and in any Church which provides a vernacular service book for its people, and recognises the validity of lay baptism, this could equally well happen. With regard to burial, it has been lawful since 1880 for the person in charge of a funeral to provide any service he wishes, conducted by whomsoever he wishes, including of course himself (see Halsbury's *Ecclesiastical Law*, Church Assembly ed., 1955, p. 372). Under pressure from injudicious reformers, both practices could become common among professing Anglicans.

[9] See *Diary of Henry Machyn* (ed. J. G. Nichols, Camden Society, 1848), p. 193; Grindal, *Works* (Parker Society), p. 1 etc.; *Zürich Letters* (Parker Society), vol. 1, p. 281; Whitgift, *Works* (Parker Society), vol. 3, pp. 368-379. See also Vernon Staley, as cited in note 4 above. The writer owes the first of these references to the Rev. J. E. Tiller.